



NARFE
FEDERAL BENEFITS EXPERTS

NARFE Chapter Development Manual

A Guide to Maintaining a Vibrant Chapter

NARFE.org

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Define Your Purpose	1
Chapter Logistics.....	1
When Should You Meet?	1
Meeting Programs.....	2
Communications	3
Newsletter	3
Email	3
Phone	4
Website	4
Social Media.....	4
Advertising Opportunities.....	5
Advertising Hints	5
Flyers.....	5
Matching Funds	5
APPENDIX	6
Membership Survey Sample	6
Chapter Self-Assessment	8

INTRODUCTION

NARFE chapters have a long and important history. Serving as the local touchpoint for the federal community, NARFE chapters provide critical grassroots support for the national legislative agenda and keep members informed on relevant state and local issues of interest. NARFE's chapters provide a way to unite federal employees, retirees, their spouses and surviving spouses throughout your community. Opportunities abound for members to get involved in leadership, governance and volunteer activities, as well as make lasting friendships.



NARFE Chapters are organized within a specific area of a state for the convenience of the members living and working within that area. It is recognized that one size does not fit all and the needs and local nature will drive the decisions that chapters make to deliver valuable and relevant experiences and opportunities for current and new members.

DEFINE YOUR PURPOSE

Chapters should regularly take the pulse of their membership to ensure that the purpose and perceived value of the organization are meeting their expectations and that the chapter members are engaged. It is important to create a vision for your chapter that will help you to focus your activities and efforts. It is equally important to listen to all members, be open to new ideas and willing to try new things.

NARFE chapters are encouraged to provide grassroots advocacy that is critical in advancing NARFE's mission of protecting the earned retirement benefits of the federal community. NARFE chapters have a unique opportunity to connect with both retired and current federal employees to expand and enrich the dialog surrounding NARFE's legislative agenda.

NARFE chapters have an opportunity to inform and inspire their members to learn the value of their federal benefits, how to make the most of them and how they can protect them. While serving NARFE's mission as the primary goal, NARFE chapters can and do share and celebrate the rewards and achievements of federal employment, as well as provide educational opportunities with programs that are of interest to their members and prospective members.

Chapters play additional key roles as recruiters, social centers, and as ambassadors for NARFE through community relations and activities supporting Alzheimer's programs, FEEA, and other local opportunities and events. (See the NARFE Community Relations Guide, FH-11.)

The NARFE chapter provides a community for local federal workers and retirees to engage in a shared experience and learn from each other.

CHAPTER LOGISTICS

Population, geography and proximity of federal employment centers in your chapter's area will determine the number of members and potential members who can participate in chapter meetings and activities. Chapters with smaller membership bases may consider partnering with other local chapters and hold joint meetings and events throughout the year.

When Should You Meet?

You will find the right answer with your members. In some groups, a breakfast meeting works best, while others prefer lunch or dinner sessions. Some have speakers, others only provide networking time. There are probably as many variations of what works as there are NARFE chapters.

There is some value in holding meetings at a consistent day and time such as noon the first Wednesday of the month. Regularity makes remembering and scheduling the meeting easier for your members, which means they are more likely to attend, but may exclude participation of others. Remember, current federal employees and second-career retirees are unlikely to be able to attend a weekday lunch or breakfast meetings.

Chapters may consider rotating the schedule to accommodate members with different time availabilities. If you always hold luncheons, try a dinner, evening or weekend meeting throughout the year. Given the varied schedules of your members, a few evening events may help get more people involved.

While most chapters meet monthly, your chapter will need to determine the frequency that you meet. Bimonthly and quarterly meetings are options. Alternating months with another local chapter may be a good solution to accommodate NARFE members in your area.

Note: The meeting space should accommodate the physical needs of all of your members. It is important that meeting attendees can hear speakers and participate in all planned activities. Audio equipment may be helpful.

Meeting Programs

Your meetings need to be relevant, inclusive, interesting and enjoyable. Business reporting should be limited to major actions. The members of your chapter may not be interested in every nuance of every decision the board has made or detailed committee reports. They are interested in the important issues affecting the federal community and the chapter, actions taken by a committee or the board, and the financial health of the organization.

Be aware that members attend meetings to learn, meet people and to get involved. It is important to survey your current members to discover interests and topics that would bring them out to a meeting. Of course, topics that are relevant to NARFE's mission and value as the "go-to resource for the Federal Community" should be a priority.

Chapters that meet each month may find it challenging to fill a speaker spot each time. It is perfectly acceptable to mix up the format with social gatherings, brainstorming sessions, round-table discussions, panel discussions, workshops or other activity. These alternative programs offer opportunity for audience participation.

Where to find speakers/facilitators:

- Elected officials (local, state, and federal)

- Faculty and staff of local colleges, universities and libraries

- Scan local newspapers and online newsfeeds for articles on people of interest:

 - Authors



- Artists
- Musicians

Regional FEHB plan providers
 Social Security and Medicare staff
 Local financial/estate planners/CPAs
 Health and wellness providers
 Elder care/elder law
 First responders/security advisors
 Travel planners
 Local hobbyists
 NARFE webinars
 Your own members

Possible Workshop Topics:

Volunteer opportunities
 Leadership development
 Recruiting strategy
 Public relations
 Social media

Meetings don't have to be just for members. When you have a speaker or program that is particularly relevant to the federal community, make it a point to invite any of the prospective members and former members of your chapter.

Many chapters have organized meetings to view a NARFE Federal Benefits Institute webinar as a group. This is a great opportunity to invite prospects and former members to demonstrate the depth and value of NARFE benefits and services. Some use of technology is involved. If a Wi-Fi connection is not available, NARFE Headquarters can provide a copy of any of the recorded programs in an mp4 format.

COMMUNICATIONS

If you were just starting your chapter today, communications would be one of your top priorities. As your chapter likely been in business for quite some time, taking a fresh look at your communications strategy is probably in order.

Newsletter

A newsletter is typically a chapter's flagship communication. This is a vehicle that reaches all of your members—especially those who do not or are unable to participate in chapter meetings or activities. So it is important that the content that you provide is relevant, informative, easily readable and enjoyable.



Here are suggestions for features in the newsletter:

- Report on current news affecting the federal community
- Provide a well-crafted letter from the chapter president
- Summarize events/meetings (especially important for non-attendees/prospects)
- Announce future meetings/events and encourage attendance—offer a way to pre-register, RSVP
- Provide a means for members to share opinions, test new ideas and create community
- Feature new members; honor members who have received awards

- Feature NARFE membership services/benefits (webinar schedule, Member Perks, upcoming events, etc...)
- Generate non-dues revenue to support the newsletter by offering advertising
- Reinforce the purpose and mission of NARFE

Remember that you are reaching a much wider audience than your board members and regular attendees. Keep a positive tone and avoid negative commentary and lengthy committee reports. Save your ink for messages that will help your membership connect with the chapter and the greater NARFE community.

Email is another way to deliver your newsletter. Give your members a choice of email or mail delivery. Also, post your current newsletter on your website.

Email

The ease of using email to communicate with our members is a blessing and a curse. Chapter leaders need to create and stick to a plan for email blasts to their members.

Chapter leaders are strongly encouraged to use the “NES” email system that is available through NARFE Headquarters. This will ensure that any emails you send out go to an accurate email list, include any opt-outs, are compliant to antispam regulations including CAN-SPAM and contain the required unsubscribe link. If your members provide you with new email addresses, please help NARFE Headquarters update our member records.

Be judicious in the number of emails that you send to your members and avoid repeating or forwarding information that they may have already received from NARFE Headquarters or the federation. Receiving excessive emails will cause members to at best unsubscribe, and at worst not renew.

You may also wish to occasionally reach out to your lapsed members and prospects to invite them to chapter events that may be of interest. A personal email invitation may be the most efficient option to reach these groups.

Note: If you do use personal email to reach a large group of people it is important that you put your list into the BCC (blind copy) field and put the senders email address in the “To” field.

★Do not use the “CC” field!

- 1) This creates a privacy issue, as everyone on the list will have access to all of the email addresses.
- 2) This opens the door for the annoying “Reply All Syndrome” which unleashes a storm of unwanted communications to your entire email file. This is completely avoidable if you **use the BCC field** to carry your list.

Phone

Phone calls are the most personal touches that you can make to your members. Having active phone tree volunteers to call with meeting reminders is a good way to get a count for an upcoming meeting. Membership or Sunshine committee volunteers can call to check in on regulars who have missed a meeting, or to call to welcome new members or new attendees. Leaders can use a brief and informal phone survey to find out how members are feeling about the chapter and feel out potential for volunteering.

Website

An online presence for your website is a requirement in this day and age because searching on the web or visiting a website is where most people start when they want learn more information.

The good news is you don't need to be a programmer to build and maintain a simple website. NARFE Headquarters offers web hosting and provides a basic template with text-based editing (WYSIWYG) for chapters and federations for a modest annual fee. Using the NARFE template is recommended as you can get help from NARFE staff if needed and to ensure that your chapter site follows NARFE's branding standards.

A website can be simple with basic information such as your meeting time and place, contact information; or more complex with newsletters, meeting summaries, calendars, photos, links and more. It is vitally important that the information on your website is accurate and current.

Social Media

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media platforms are other potential opportunities for outreach and public relations. Please see the NARFE PR Handbook (FH-9) for more on this subject.



ADVERTISING OPPORTUNITIES

To grow interest in your chapter and increase attendance at meetings, you will need to promote your chapter and upcoming programs.

The opportunities for free and paid advertising in communities across the country are as diverse as each NARFE chapter. You will need to do a little research to find the opportunities that are available in and cover events in your area. Here are some places to start:

- Local News Services – Calendar listings print and online.
- Military Base News Services – Calendar listings print and online
- Spingo.com – Online event listing service
- Patch.com – Online Local Community News/Calendar
- YoureventFREE.com – Online event listing service
- Home Owner Association Newsletters and Websites
- Local Representative’s Newsletters and Websites
- Nextdoor – Social media network for neighborhoods

Make sure that you include your website and/or an email address so that interested people can learn more on their own or have an immediate point of contact. Some of the online listing services require a website address.

If you have a Facebook (FB) page for your chapter, create a FB event and share it with your local friends. Encourage your chapter members to share the event to THEIR friends.

Create business cards for your recruiters and chapter leaders with your chapter contact information, website address and the NARFE 800#. You may also create generic cards with chapter and NARFE information that all members can use to hand out to potential members.

Advertising Hints

When advertising an event or meeting, lead with an enticing, descriptive program title. This will attract more attention than if you were to lead with NARFE, National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association, or even NARFE Chapter #5678.

While we are all proud of our organization and the work that we do for the federal community, NARFE is not a household word. Many who know about the organization are not aware of the valuable benefits and services that we provide to the entire federal community.

Flyers

Flyers are an advertising method that never goes out of style and are relatively inexpensive to produce. Again, you’ll want to lead with an enticing, descriptive title to promote your event. And be sure to include where, when and how much if there is a fee. If there is not a fee—make sure you say “FREE!” Ask for an RSVP if you need a headcount or if you have limited space.

Place flyers in well-traveled spaces near federal worksites, at libraries, near or in senior centers, coffee shops, etc.

Matching Funds

NARFE headquarters has a limited budget to support field recruitment through our Matching Funds Program. This program is outlined in detail in the Membership Marketing Manual (FH-19). You can also find guidelines online in “Officer Resources” in Tips, Tools & Templates under “Other Resources.”

APPENDIX

MEMBERSHIP SURVEY SAMPLE

One of the best ways to get the feedback from your members is to ask for their thoughts. The easiest way to do that is through a survey. A survey provides an anonymous way to voice opinions that might otherwise go unheard. And a survey format provides a relatively easy way to organize answers so that you can tabulate the information and massage the data in to actionable items.

The questions you ask will be driven by what you want to learn—but keep it short. Here are a few suggestions to get you started.

1) Get to know your members

Because your survey will be anonymous, it is important to know some history about the members who answer.

How long have you been a member of chapter XXXX?

Have you ever served on the board or a committee?

How many chapter functions/meetings have you attended in the past 12 months?

What other organizations do you belong to?

2) Use your current membership to learn how to attract new members

How did you find out about chapter XXXX?

What made you decide to join the chapter?

When you attend chapter meetings do you feel welcomed and included?

3) Find out how your members feel about how your chapter operates and engages members

How valuable do you find chapter meetings?

How valuable to you find the chapter newsletter?

How valuable do you find the chapter website?

How do you prefer to receive news/announcements from the chapter:

- Postal Mail
- Email
- Website
- Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc...)

My interest in chapter XXXX is primarily

- Social
- Learn new skills
- Employ leadership skills
- Advocate for the federal community
- Hear from federal benefit experts
- Learn about legislation that affects my benefits/future

Ask for suggestions to evolve the chapter

If you rarely or never attend chapter meetings or events, what could we do that would change that?

- Day/time of meeting (Please indicate your preference)
- Programming (Please indicate your interests)
- Location of meeting (Please suggest a alternative)
- Will not attend. Can you tell us why? _____
- Other _____

Chapter XXXX is an all-volunteer organization. Would you consider donating a few hours a month to assist with: (Check any that apply.)

- Grassroots events
- Meeting planning
- Communications
- Hospitality
- Recruitment and retention
- Governance
- Public relations
- etc...

Ask about the future

How likely are you to renew your membership?

What would you like to learn about at an upcoming meeting?

Is there anything else you would like us to know?

These questions are primarily suggestions for you to work from to develop your survey. You may want to add, remove or reword. Do remember to keep it short and simple. This is important for the people taking the survey as well as the people compiling the responses!

How to Distribute Your Survey

- 1) **Online Survey:** Many of the popular survey platforms offer free limited access. Compare the pros and cons before forging ahead. For example, Survey Monkey limits responses to 100; Survey Legend does not offer data exports.
- 2) **By Postal Mail:** Provide a reply envelope
- 3) **Newsletter:** Include an insert

You want to discourage duplicate responses, and may want to provide an online survey to members with email addresses, and a postal survey to those without email address.

Prepare members for the survey. Announce when the survey will be sent, how it will be sent and when they need to respond by. After the survey goes out, send a reminder several days before the end date to increase participation.

CHAPTER SELF-ASSESSMENT

Whether we like it or not, members make a decision to join, participate and remain in a chapter based on “What’s in it for me?” It’s up to the chapter leaders to determine, define and deliver the value that will keep members engaged and excited about your chapter. Here’s a quick self-assessment that may help you determine if you are on track with your chapter.

For New Members Do You...	Always	Never	At Times
1) Reach out to new members to invite to the next meeting or event?			
2) Introduce new members to make the feel welcome?			
3) Provide orientation on NARFE, federation and chapter?			
4) Find out what their interests are/why they joined?			

For New Members Do You...	Always	Never	At Times
1) Have one or more greeters?			
2) Provide name badges for attendees?			
3) Have informative discussions and/or interesting speakers?			
4) Have an agenda and stay on time?			
5) Provide refreshments for members and guests?			
6) Allow time to mingle?			

For New Members Do You...	Always	Never	At Times
1) Have one or more greeters?			
2) Provide name badges for attendees?			
3) Have informative discussions and/or interesting speakers?			
4) Have an agenda and stay on time?			
5) Provide refreshments for members and guests?			
6) Allow time to mingle?			
7) Invite prospects to meetings and events?			
8) Network and work with other organizations (Chamber of Commerce, FEHB Carriers, Federal Executive Board, etc.)?			
9) Work to protect retirement and health benefits?			
10) Have recruiting events or help members with recruiting materials?			
11) Periodically call or reach out to members who don’t attend meetings?			
12) Survey your members about their expectations for the chapter?			

Take a tally of the Always/Never/At Times columns for each area and take stock of the opportunities for development you can do to keep members happy with what your chapter provides. Remember the chapter serves the members and they will expect value for their dues, time and effort. If you need help reach out to your federation officers. They are available to help.



606 North Washington Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314-1914

800-456-8410

NARFE.org